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Panetta Praises Security Transition Progress in Afghanistan

02 January 2013

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Washington — Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta lauded Afghan President Hamid Karzai's announcement that Afghanistan has entered the second-to-last stage of the transition of security responsibility from NATO's International Security Assistance Force to Afghan security forces.

"It is another sign of steady progress that the government of Afghanistan has announced the fourth tranche of the transition process," Panetta said in a statement issued December 31.

Afghanistan's security transition is designed to take place in five tranches, or stages. The transition is in line with the plan set forth at the Lisbon summit, ISAF officials said in a news release issued December 31.

"I congratulate President Karzai, his national security team, and the Afghan National Security Forces for their commitment to taking even more of a lead role for the security of the Afghan people," Panetta said.

As part of the fourth tranche, 12 Afghan provinces entered the security transition process, ISAF officials said. Afghanistan now has 23 of its 34 provinces entirely in the transition process. The provinces added in tranche four are primarily in the north and interior of the country, said officials, noting that one district in Helmand province is also included in the announcement.

"This step demonstrates the success of our strategy and the progress that the men and women of ISAF, working closely with our Afghan partners, are achieving every day in Afghanistan," Panetta said.

"President Karzai's announcement of the fourth group of provinces to enter transition is another historic step for Afghanistan as it gets closer to taking full responsibility for security of the entire country," said Marine Corps General John R. Allen, the commander of ISAF and U.S. Forces-Afghanistan.

"With the addition of these 12 full provinces to the transition process, Afghan National Security Forces are now taking the security lead in areas where 87 percent of the Afghan people live," Allen said.

This is a strong indicator that Afghanistan is on the path to full self-governance, Panetta said.

"Going forward, our efforts in Afghanistan will continue to ensure that the Afghan people can secure and govern themselves, and to deny safe haven to al-Qaida. Today's announcement marks another major advance toward those goals," he said.

It is expected that all parts of Afghanistan will have begun transition by the summer of 2013, ISAF officials said, putting the Afghan forces in the lead for security nationwide.

Ambassador Maurits R. Jochems, NATO's senior civilian representative in Afghanistan, recognized that the progress made in professionalism and confidence by the Afghan National Security Forces has enabled the transition strategy to succeed.

Speaking about NATO and ISAF's commitment to Afghanistan, Jochems said, "ISAF will continue to support the Afghan National Security Forces until the end of 2014, and after that NATO and its partners remain committed to Afghanistan's future stability through a new mission to train, advise and assist the Afghan National Security Forces."

Data Show Peace Is Profitable, Organization Says

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer | 02 January 2013

Washington — Violence is expensive. Countries not only pay a lot of money to build, supply and maintain military and police forces, but also to investigate and punish criminal activity. Worldwide, at least \$9 trillion is spent each year in response to violence and the threat of violence. What would happen if countries could reduce violence and use the savings to improve things like education, the rule of law and coexistence?

For six years, the Australian-based Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) not only has been asking that question, but also collecting hard data proving the economic and social benefits of peace, and steps that every country can take to end the vicious cycle of having to divert resources from beneficial programs to counter chronic violence and instability.

IEP's annual Global Peace Index measures peace in 158 countries using 23 indicators, including political terror, internal conflicts, crime, incarceration rates, relations with neighbors, military expenditures and weapons exports. The index is able to show what the most peaceful countries, Iceland and Denmark, have in common, and the same for war-torn Somalia and Afghanistan, which were ranked the least peaceful in the 2012 report.

It is an innovative way to quantify how a reduction in violence or the threat of violence can make a country more resilient to crises, attract entrepreneurs and

investors, and achieve greater prosperity for its people, said Michelle Breslauer, the U.S. program manager at IEP.

"For the first time we are measuring peace and we're putting together statistical analysis that is evidence for what issues people should focus on, and to try to really quantify the impact of violence on a society," Breslauer said.

IEP's reports have generated significant interest around the world. Breslauer said some governments have contacted the nonprofit research agency to indicate they want to increase their country's ranking on the index, and asking what steps they can take.

Breslauer said her organization has calculated eight components — or "pillars" — that mark a society's peacefulness, and they are all interdependent.

The eight pillars are a well-functioning government; a sound business environment; an equitable distribution of resources; an acceptance of the rights of others; good relations with neighbors; the free flow of information; high levels of education; and low levels of corruption.

Breslauer says money spent on violence is not productive, arguing, for example, that education creates more jobs than military spending does.

Take spending away from military or imprisonment and put it into education and "not only could that create more jobs so it has an economic benefit, but it also then helps to strengthen the peacefulness of a society because you're investing in one of these pillars of peace — education — and what they will hopefully lead to is, in turn, a reduction in levels of violence and so you start to create a virtuous cycle," she said.

There is room for improvement in every country, so Breslauer encourages those who want to find out what steps their country can take to look at all of the data IEP compiled to determine its rank on the Global Peace Index. The data shows that peace is multidimensional and depends on many interrelated factors. But it also shows which of the eight pillars are in most need of strengthening.

By understanding how the level of violence in your own community is related to education, incarceration, entrepreneurship, cooperation between ethnic and religious groups and other factors, you realize "not only is violence something you can address and try to work against, but it also makes a huge impact on society," she said.

Breslauer said IEP is also planning to release a report in early 2013 with interesting data on how corruption affects

peace levels. The organization has found that at a definable "tipping point," lower corruption leads to a disproportionate increase in peace levels. But the corruption tipping point also works the other way, she said.

When corruption causes less confidence in public institutions, including less trust in the police and the rule of law, existing group grievances can combine with that loss of trust and more easily lead to violence.

The upcoming report plans to demonstrate at what point corruption and peace have a higher impact on each other and offer examples, she said.

"Faith in America's Future" Is 2013 Obama Inaugural Theme

31 December 2012

Washington — Ceremonies for President Obama's inauguration for a second term will have "Faith in America's Future" as an overall theme.

New York Democratic Senator Charles E. Schumer, chairman of the Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies (JCCIC), which selected the theme, said the theme commemorates the United States' perseverance and unity and marks the 150th year since placement of the Statue of Freedom atop the new Capitol Dome in 1863.

When the U.S. Civil War threatened to bring construction of the dome to a halt, workers pressed on, even without pay, until Congress approved additional funding to complete the dome that would become a symbol of unity and democracy to the entire world. The official inaugural program, luncheon and other activities will reflect the theme, the JCCIC said.

"Our nation has faced countless challenges throughout its history, and each time we have come together as Americans and moved forward with renewed strength," Schumer said. "During the 57th presidential inauguration, Americans from across the country will gather beneath the Capitol Dome to celebrate our history, take measure of how far we have come, and look towards our future with hope and determination."

Inaugural "themes" are relatively recent additions to the ceremonies surrounding a presidential inauguration and highlight historic events that helped shape the U.S. democracy and the peaceful transfer of power that a U.S. presidential inauguration symbolizes.

According to the JCCIC website, the 2013 inauguration will be the third with an overall theme. The first, President George W. Bush's inauguration for a second

term in 2005, had "A Vision of America" as its theme. The JCCIC said this theme commemorated "two centuries of American exploration, development, and conservation of our nation's ample resources and scenic beauty, and looks ahead to a new century of scientific expeditions and research that will span the globe, probe far into space, and continue the wise stewardship of America's natural resources." The theme was chosen, JCCIC said, to commemorate 200 years since the Lewis and Clark expedition in 1805 sighted the Pacific Ocean, reaching the end of its mission to explore the newly acquired Louisiana Territory.

"A New Birth of Freedom" was the theme for Obama's 2009 inauguration as the nation prepared to celebrate the 200th anniversary of President Abraham Lincoln's birth. Despite changes over time in inaugural traditions, the JCCIC said, the "ceremonies continue to bring together the three branches of the federal government, with the magnificent backdrop of the gleaming white Capitol dome, for an event that represents the purposes and ideals that Abraham Lincoln so often expressed, for national renewal, continuity, and unity."

2013: "FAITH IN AMERICA'S FUTURE"

The 2013 theme marks the 150th anniversary of completion of the exterior of the Capitol Dome.

On March 4, 1861, when Abraham Lincoln took the oath of office, the half-built dome epitomized a nation being torn in two, the JCCIC says. "Slowly and steadily, work continued on the massive dome during the tumultuous years of the Civil War. Skilled and unskilled workers, including African Americans who began the project enslaved and continued as free labor following the D.C. Emancipation Act of 1862, performed arduous tasks such as operating machinery at dangerous heights to hoist the heavy cast iron pieces into place."

The U.S. Capitol Building's great cast-iron dome is an astonishing feat of architecture and engineering. It was the Capitol's second dome; the earlier wooden one was removed as a precaution against fire. Work began in 1855 with the removal of the old wooden dome. At the outbreak of the Civil War, the contractor was advised not to expect further payment but the company decided to continue anyway. That decision, according to a history of the dome from the Architect of the Capitol, inspired President Lincoln and others to see the dome as a sign that the nation would also continue. The last section of the Statue of Freedom was positioned on December 2, 1863, and the interior was finished in 1866. The dome's total cost was \$1,047,291.

The JCCIC also said 1863 "was one of the most fateful in our nation's history. It began with the Emancipation

Proclamation on January 1st, and ended with a celebration of the new Capitol Dome crowned by the Statue of Freedom in December. It also was the year of the first homestead claim, the start of the first transcontinental railroad, the opening of the first land grant college, and President Lincoln's historic and visionary Gettysburg Address."

U.S. Offers Assistance to Blunt Spread of Violent Extremism

By Phillip Kurata | Staff Writer | 31 December 2012

Washington — The U.S. government is providing training to police agencies, prosecutors and prison officials in dozens of countries to blunt the appeal of violent extremism, according to the State Department's outgoing chief of counterterrorism, Daniel Benjamin.

Looking ahead to the work in 2013 of quelling violent extremism, Benjamin said harsh practices used by security forces are among the most potent factors that contribute to radicalization. "The goal of our counterterrorism assistance is and must be to help countries move away from repressive approaches toward developing true rule-of-law frameworks," Benjamin said December 18 at the Brookings Institution in Washington.

U.S. officials from the departments of Justice, Defense and Homeland Security are dispatched abroad to train host countries to deal with criminals and to secure their borders in ways that do not cause a backlash and radicalization, he said.

The U.S. government's premier program for helping criminal justice agencies to upgrade their counterterrorism capacities is the Anti-Terrorism Assistance program, Benjamin said. The program covers a wide spectrum of skills, from bomb detection and crime-scene investigation to border security, aviation security and cybersecurity, he said.

During the 2012 fiscal year that ended September 30, more than 9,800 people from more than 50 countries received counterterrorism training through this program, Benjamin said.

The U.S. government also puts Justice Department officials, known as resident legal advisers, in U.S. embassies to mentor host-country prosecutors and law enforcement officials in complex cases, including terrorist crimes, he said.

Indonesia is an example of a country that has made "extraordinary strides" in developing civilian legal structures and law enforcement institutions to fight terrorism effectively and within the rule of law, he said. Benjamin said Indonesia has recorded more than 160

convictions in terrorist cases and the national police has had major successes in breaking up terrorist cells linked to Jemaah Islamiya and other violent extremist organizations. "Capacity building can work, and we must continue to innovate to improve the efficacy," he said.

Benjamin added that the U.S. government is working with the United Nations and a Dutch entity, the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, to reform prison practices so that extremist ideologies do not spread while prisoners are incarcerated.

"Many incarcerated terrorists will eventually be released, and we need to take steps to decrease the likelihood that they will return to violence when they're back on the streets," Benjamin said. When jailed terrorists are cut off from their previous extremist contacts, their time in prison can be used to induce positive changes in an environment of good correctional practices, he said. More than 35 nations, along with multilateral organizations and independent experts, are participating in the prison initiative. "We believe that we've made an enormous amount of progress in tackling this vital ... issue over the past several years, but there's still much that can and should be done in this area," he said.

Benjamin said the Global Counterterrorism Forum, supported by 29 countries plus the European Union, has produced recommendations for the rule of law, combating kidnapping for ransom — the primary means of funding terrorist groups — and prison deradicalization. The forum recently opened the Center of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism in Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates. In 2013, the forum will open a similar institution, the International Institute for Justice and Rule of Law, in Tunis, Tunisia, where the Arab Awakening began, he added.

A 51st U.S. State? It Could Happen

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer | 28 December 2012

Washington — The United States began as a union of 13 former British colonies. The state roster, expanding incrementally through two centuries, now stands at 50, but that could change.

Puerto Rico has functioned as an unincorporated U.S. territory since 1898. Its residents hold U.S. citizenship and can move freely throughout the United States. They are subject to U.S. federal laws and pay some U.S. taxes, but lack voting representation in the U.S. Congress. After decades of debate about the island's political status, 54 percent of Puerto Ricans indicated they were not satisfied with the status quo in a November 6 referendum.

The referendum came in two parts, asking voters whether statehood, independence or "sovereign free association,"

which would grant the island more autonomy, would be their preference if the island's political status was changed. Of the nearly 1.78 million voters, nearly 800,000 (61 percent) of those expressing an opinion chose statehood. About 437,000 chose sovereign free association, and 72,560 voted for independence. Nearly 500,000 did not express an opinion.

White House press secretary Jay Carney told reporters December 3 that the results showed "the people of Puerto Rico have made it clear that they want a resolution to the issue of the island's political status," and he recommended the U.S. Congress "study the results closely and provide the people of Puerto Rico with a clear path forward that lays out the means by which Puerto Ricans themselves can determine their own status."

For Puerto Rico to become a U.S. state, it would need a majority vote of approval from both houses of Congress. Article IV, Section Three of the U.S. Constitution states simply that Congress has the power to admit new U.S. states, provided that they guarantee "full faith and credit" to the now 50 states that already exist. That means Puerto Rico would have to recognize the legal contracts, marriages and criminal judgments approved by other U.S. states.

The road to statehood is not an easy one. In the District of Columbia, a majority of residents have repeatedly expressed their desire to gain voting representation in Congress. Unlike Puerto Rico, the district's status is complicated by the fact that it was established by statute in 1790 as the national capital under the exclusive jurisdiction of the U.S. Congress. That presents peculiar legal obstacles to statehood that a U.S. territory like Puerto Rico would not face.

HOW TO BECOME A U.S. STATE

The last time a U.S. state was admitted was in 1959, when the territories of Alaska and Hawaii became states. As with both of those states, a Puerto Rican bid for full membership would draw on legal precedents passed by U.S. legislators as the United States expanded westward across North America from the 13 original British colonies.

After the United States gained its independence in 1783, Americans began to settle a large area under U.S. control known as the Northwest Territory. The 670,000-square-kilometer region extended south of the Great Lakes, north and west of the Ohio River, and east of the Mississippi River. With the goal of westward expansion, U.S. lawmakers began clarifying how areas in the Northwest Territory could be admitted as U.S. states, and decided in the 1787 Northwest Ordinance that the first qualification was to have a population of at least 60,000 people.

By the end of 1801, it became clear that Ohio, the easternmost part of the Northwest Territory, would soon meet the 60,000 person threshold, and the U.S. Congress passed the Enabling Act of 1802 (also known as the Ohio Enabling Act) to establish legal mechanisms for Ohio to join the United States as an equal member of the union. It would serve as the blueprint for the future.

Under that law, Ohio residents were asked to elect one representative for each 1,200 people to a November 1, 1802, convention that would decide by a majority vote if Ohioans would write a constitution and form a state government. If the vote was "yes," the delegates would proceed to "form for the people of the said State a constitution and State government, provided the same shall be republican, and not repugnant" to elected representative government elsewhere in the United States. In other words, would-be leaders of Ohio could not set themselves up as autocrats.

In addition to writing and adopting their state's constitution, the Ohioans also were asked to set aside a certain proportion of land in each township to be used for schools, and to use 5 percent of revenue from land sales to create roads through their proposed state. They also were allowed only one member of the U.S. House of Representatives pending the results of the next U.S. census, which would be taken in 1810 and create a fairer allocation.

The delegates approved a state constitution on November 29, 1802. On February 19, 1803, Congress determined that Ohio had met the requirements of the Enabling Act and passed legislation declaring Ohio "has become one of the United States of America." The legislation was then signed by President Thomas Jefferson.

The legal process for becoming a U.S. state has not changed much since 1803. A U.S. territory begins the process by demonstrating through local elections that there is a consensus for statehood, and then it formally petitions the U.S. Congress. It must draft a constitution creating a representative form of government and submit it to the U.S. Congress for majority approval. Finally, the U.S. president would sign the bill into law, creating the new state.

If Puerto Ricans, D.C. residents or others are thinking seriously about U.S. statehood, they should be forewarned that it is an irreversible decision. After the 1860-1861 secession crisis and the American Civil War, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 1869 that joining the United States is "an indissoluble relation" and the U.S. Constitution does not allow states to leave unilaterally.

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